

HOW TO USE

SOCIAL

AS AN **ADVOCACY** TOOL

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When Barack Obama ran for President in 2008, he not only used a grassroots campaign to reach out to his constituents, he also utilized social media. President Obama is often referred as the “Social Media President” because of how he used Twitter and Facebook as a means of communicating his messages. Since Obama’s run for President, other politicians and federal government officials have sought to capitalize on social media’s reach by creating their own Facebook, YouTube and Twitter accounts. Policymakers are engaging in social media to not only interact with their local communities, but to keep their constituents informed about upcoming meetings, speeches and visits, as well as campaign news. For example, Rep. Glenn Thompson (R-PA), co-chair of the Congressional Career and Technical Education (CTE) Caucus, made a speech about the importance of CTE on the House floor in June, which was shortly followed by a blog post as well as updates on Facebook and YouTube.

MEDIA

Social Media Primer

There are a number of tools in the ever-changing and often overwhelming social media landscape. What follows is a quick review of the major types of social applications.

- Blogs, in which the user posts content open for comment from readers, are one of the oldest types of social media. Microblogs, where the user is limited to very short updates, have soared in popularity over the past few years. The most well-known of these is Twitter, which limits you to 140 characters per post.
- Facebook, the world's largest social network, is a vibrant personal and professional network, while LinkedIn is a social network with a professional emphasis. In addition to these general networks, location-based social networking such as Foursquare and Facebook Places, as well as event-based social networking through Meetup and Facebook Events, are on the rise.
- There are a host of multimedia tools such as YouTube for posting videos online, SlideShare for slide presentations and Skype for making online calls worldwide.

Why You Need to Use Social Media as an Advocacy Tool

Social media is an important tool in your advocacy toolbox and a method you can use to educate media, Members of Congress, and state policymakers about the critical need for CTE—especially as America faces tight budgets and a stagnating economy. A majority of politicians are using blogs, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook to communicate with the public. Facebook and Twitter provide politicians an opportunity to introduce bills and publicize visits, while YouTube gives policymakers a chance to share video of speeches and make announcements. For example, Newt Gingrich announced his 2012 run for president on Twitter and YouTube. In addition, President Obama and members of his administration, including Education Secretary Arne Duncan, use social media regularly. Want to educate Secretary Duncan about your CTE program? Send him a tweet about how your program graduates students, lowers dropout rates, or provides adults with certificates. You can also post your story on the U.S. Department of Education's Facebook page.

Members of the media also employ social media tools to share information with their readers and to find sources for future stories. A national survey of

reporters and editors revealed how they use social media. For instance:

- 89 percent use blogs for story research
- 65 percent turn to social media sites like Facebook and LinkedIn
- 52 percent use Twitter

Businesses that rely on CTE are using all of the above-mentioned tools to connect with their customers and their future workforce. For instance, CEV Multimedia, a producer of multimedia educational materials, shares CTE news and success stories on Facebook and Twitter and posts video lesson previews on YouTube.

ACTE's Social Media Success

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) has been using social media for the past three years to interact with education reporters and editors from around the country. ACTE has responded to media requests for data and resources, resulting in 13 stories published recently. In addition, ACTE has been increasing its use of social media for general and targeted advocacy, notably through the Association's first CTE Social Media Advocacy Day.

When the Fiscal Year 2011 budget negotiations took a turn for the worse for CTE, ACTE decided to mobilize its

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growing online network for its first Social Media Advocacy Day on February 17. ACTE staff set certain goals: 250 tweets and/or Facebook updates and 50 blog posts—all about the benefits of CTE, and how important maintaining funding for the Perkins Act is to the economy and workforce. That day, our social networks were so busy it was difficult to keep up with the stream of messages. Updates ranged the gamut from data on CTE's efficacy and stories of student success to direct appeals to legislators to save Perkins funds. The final results of ACTE's Social Media Advocacy Day included:

- 475 original tweets and re-tweets on Twitter
- 42 Facebook updates
- 12 blog posts

As you can see, Twitter was the most active network for social media advocacy that day. This may be due, at least in part, to how easily and quickly Twitter can be updated. Not surprisingly, blog posts, which take the most time to compose, were the least used advocacy method. ACTE staff will take this data into account when preparing future online advocacy campaigns.

Starting Your Own Online CTE Advocacy Campaign

The first step when using social media as an advocacy tool is to determine which platforms make the most sense for your particular needs. Start with a search for the policymakers and media you want to reach. ACTE has created a social media

advocacy page on its Web site with a list of legislators and the social media sites they are using; this can serve as a starting point. If you are acting not just for yourself, but on behalf of a group such as an ACTE State Association, be sure to survey your colleagues to see which social tools they already use. If you find a correlation between where your desired audience is communicating online and the platforms your fellow educators are using, that is the online network for you.

Once you have picked one or more platforms for your social media advocacy, you can begin crafting your CTE advocacy messages. Try using the sample messages provided by ACTE on its social media advocacy page; you can tailor them to your particular economic and political situation. Good messages will share at least one of the following: the benefits students derive from CTE classes and accreditation, the gains students reap because of CTE courses and career-technical student organization activities, the benefits businesses get from hiring CTE students, or how Perkins funding has enabled CTE and improved student outcomes.

When creating your social media advocacy messages, bear the following in mind:

- Keep it short and direct.
- Employ data and stories.
- Use strong but respectful language that makes your point clear without descending into rudeness—this can dilute your message and lead to removal from social networking sites.



- Provide links for more information.
- Re-tweet others' messages when relevant to your cause, and thank them for participating.

Social Media Management

In conjunction with your social media advocacy, you will need to manage and track the results of your efforts. The following tools can help you quickly and easily access your social networks, schedule updates, and monitor your impact.

With HootSuite you can manage multiple social networks at once, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Myspace, Foursquare, and WordPress. You can also track the use of a particular hashtag. (This is a keyword that begins with the hash or pound symbol that makes it easier to track your social media advocacy efforts. ACTE uses #CareerTechEd to engage the CTE community.) HootSuite includes a scheduling function so that you can plan future posts, and a statistics module that reports how often the links you share have been clicked. It also shortens those links so that they take up less room when you are composing your updates.

To measure the exposure that your tweets generate, check out TweetReach. It analyzes your tweets to give you a picture of the reach you have achieved across the Web. If you've picked Facebook as your online advocacy platform of choice, try Facebook Insights. This built-in statistics program allows page administrators to access data such as number and demographics of active users, and the "likes" and comments that your page has generated.

Accessing Social Media at School

Unfortunately, your school or district may block social media sites that would be useful for CTE advocacy, professional development and student learning. However, you can be proactive in opening up social media in your school. Find out the Internet use policies in your institution or district, and the procedure for requesting that a Web site be unblocked. You may need to work with an administrator or a technology staffer on this process. When making your case for unblocking a site, include data and a strong justification for why the site will be useful to you and your students. **IT**

Mobile Advocacy—In addition to exploring social media for advocacy, ACTE has established a mobile advocacy group. Receive alerts on your mobile phone when urgent action is needed on CTE issues. To sign up to it, text **CTEALERT** to **88202**. You will be contacted only when it is vital that you act; for instance, when important legislation is coming up for a vote.

Resources

ACTE Social Media Advocacy
www.acteonline.org

ACTE on Twitter
www.twitter.com/actecareertech

ACTE on Facebook
www.facebook.com/actecareertech

ACTE on LinkedIn
www.linkedin.com/e/gis/107247

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